INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

Vol. VI, No. 3 Autumn 1985

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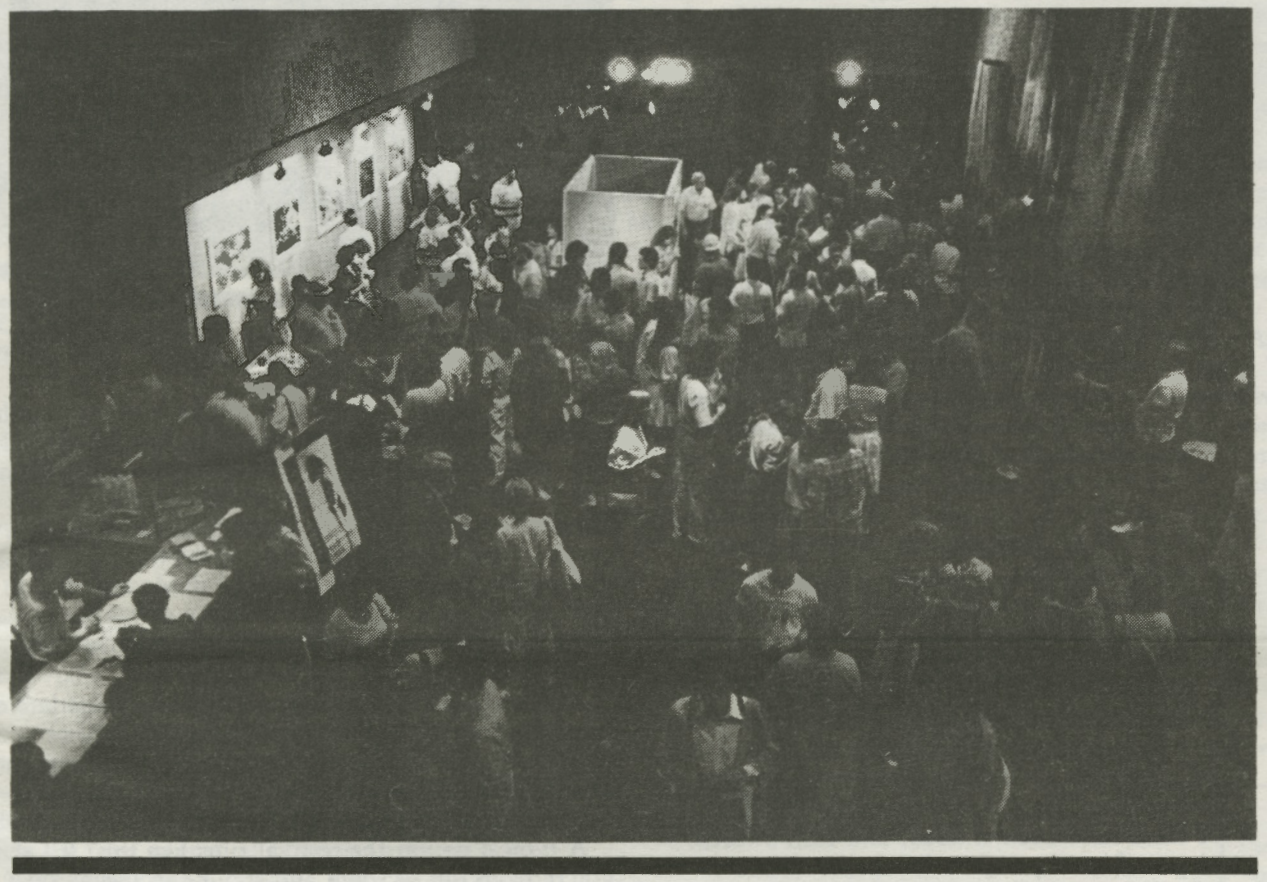
Sinking Creek Film Celebration



The Sixteenth Annual Sinking Creek Film Celebration was held at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. (Photo by F. Lynne Bachleda)

F. Lynne Bachleda

Sinking Creek is more than just a film festival. It is a concert of film art. It is a place of adventure where, a long time after the festival has closed, the magic of film provides us with music and images.

--Jules Engel,
Director of Film Graphics, Animation
California Institute of the Arts

"Sinking Creek is the best thing that ever happened to film." That grand claim from a 1985 audience member may be an overstatement, but it may just be true. No other film festival has quite the same reputation for fostering all kinds of independent filmmaking, teaching all participants about independent film, providing hospitality and maintaining organization. If you are interested in film, plan now to be at Vanderbilt University in Nashville June 10-14, 1986 for the Seventeenth Annual Sinking Creek Film Festival. Full registration costs only $55 ($45 for students), and it is well worth the price. Single admissions are also available. (Full registration is not required).

Vanderbilt has contributed substantial "in-kind" to Sinking Creek since its 1973 move from Greeneville, Tennessee. The layout of the Sarratt Student Center is perfect with its complement of a 350-seat theatre with good projection and sound (but with hard "no-doze" seats), spacious lobby with gallery (photo mosaics by a Penland artist and Sinking Creek award-winning filmmaker Dan Bailey this year), courtyard for light and air, rooms for film and video production workshops, film analysis and plain ol' hanging out with coffee and doughnuts, and lots of talk with some of the nation's best artists, critics, teachers and programmers.

"Everybody who is doing good work from all over the country has been here at least once--many of them more than once," says Cecile Starr of The Women's Independent Film Exchange and a 1985 program guest, who screened and discussed the haunting and beautiful work of little-known pioneer women filmmakers.

The hall of fame names jump out from the past years' program books: experimentalists Stan Vanderbeek, Pat O'Neill, Bob Russett, Standish Lawder and Ed Emshwiller; documentarians Willard Van Dyke, Barbara Kopple, Ross Spears, Stan Woodward, D.A. Pennebaker, Claudia Weill, Bill Miles and Ricky Leacock; animators Faith Hubley, Jules Engel, Eli Noyes, George Griffin, Derek Lamb and Frank Mouris, to name but a few. The programmers, scholars and critics have included the likes of Marjorie Rosen, author of *Popcorn Venus;* Pearl Bowser of Chamba, a New York-based Black historical archive; Marie Grieco, consultant, writer and lecturer; Anthony Slide, now a writer and formerly of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; and John Boundy, the U.S. General Manager for the National Film Board of Canada.

No doubt it is the magnetic personality of founder and director Mary Jane Coleman and the kind, easy manner of accomplice and co-director George Griffin that has held so many luminaries and "yet-to-be luminaries" fast to "the Creek."

"The Creek" exists in two places: Greeneville (Yes, there is a Sinking Creek in Greene County) and Nashville, Tennessee. Creekside Farm, the Greeneville home of husband Nat, a successful attorney, and Mary Jane Coleman, is an integral part of Sinking Creek. Their 100-acre farm and handsomely restored farmhouse set on a hill with its backside to the meditative Smoky Mountains is frequently open to all manner of people who care deeply about the independent cinema.

I was lucky enough to be able to invite myself there in 1979 as a member of the Tennessee Arts Commission staff, and I have gone back every chance since, for in most ways Creekside Farm with its casual comfort is the year-round heart of the Sinking Creek Film Celebration. The "corporate headquarters" are there (recently moved from the kitchen across the breezeway to an old storage room), as is the film library and screening room. Mary Jane and George use this library which contains 290 Sinking Creek award-winning films to promote the Independent Cinema year-round. To date they have given 278 lecture/screenings in twenty-three states and three foreign countries. In 1979 they were sent to Czechoslovakia, Romania and Poland by the United States Information Agency to screen thirty nine films representing the work of U.S. independents.

If Sinking Creek is a bastion of quality, old and new, then filmmakers and film lovers should thank the Tennessee Arts Commission. While a TAC member, Mary Jane was exposed to independent film by way of a single program in November, 1968 by TAC Media Arts Panel Chair B.J. Stiles and panel member Ron Henderson. A long time supporter of the visual arts, especially in Upper East Tennessee, and a sometimes painter and collagist, Mary Jane's imagination was electrified by what she saw on the screen. She recalls, "I didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew I was going to do something about those films."

Simply, and not-so-simply, since she knew little about the art form, much less staging a film festival, she began by securing $1,500 from the Greeneville Arts Guild, which she founded. That money was matched by Tusculum College where the first three festivals were held. From the very start her concern was for the filmmakers. Of that initial $3,000 she gave $2,000 in cash awards to artists at the First Annual Sinking Creek Film Celebration in Greeneville in 1970. Trading heavily in those early days on her ability to say "I don't know. Will you help me?" she persevered, slowly building national connections and a solid reputation for Sinking Creek.

ON THE COVER: Jane Wallace is Caroline Braxley in Steven John Ross' feature film, THE OLD FOREST, an adaptation of the story by Peter Taylor which premiered at the 1985 Sinking Creek Film Celebration.

I don't have any objectivity about Mary Jane. I admire her for her achievement, stubbornness, knowledge about that slippery thing called art, and her ability to tell a funny story. Her introductions of program guests at Sinking Creek are always interesting, well-staged and resoundingly laudatory.

Her stubbornness has, I'm sure, made "the Creek" what it is today--a first-class showcase for independent cinema--but her stubbornness also makes for slow change. Until recently, she has, for example, always insisted that the term "Celebration" be applied to the 5-day June event because that word reflects her feeling about independent film and it emphasized the differences of Sinking Creek, which includes educational workshops in June and its year-round lecture/screening programs. This year, sixteen years later, she has consciously decided to apply the term "film festival" to the June event for public understanding's sake.

Now, Sinking Creek Film Celebration, Inc. is comprised of on-going program activities such as Films in the Park, the Critical Eye Series, year-round lecture/screenings, the June film festival, plus an innovative project using film with the mentally retarded.

Mary Jane does, however, try to remain flexible to the needs of the field. Four years ago she recognized the growing trend among independents toward longer films to accommodate the needs of the television market, which is one of the few places a documentary or narrative filmmaker can begin to recoup the inevitably high cost of production. Accordingly, she increased the allowed running time of competition entries from thirty to sixty minutes. This increase in running time necessitated prescreening of entries prior to judging. I prescreened films the first year and have been lucky enough to do it in subsequent years, so I know first-hand how nervous and cautious Mary Jane is about prescreening. "Filmmakers don't like the idea that their work will be discarded before judging," she cautioned, ever mindful of the people who make the art.

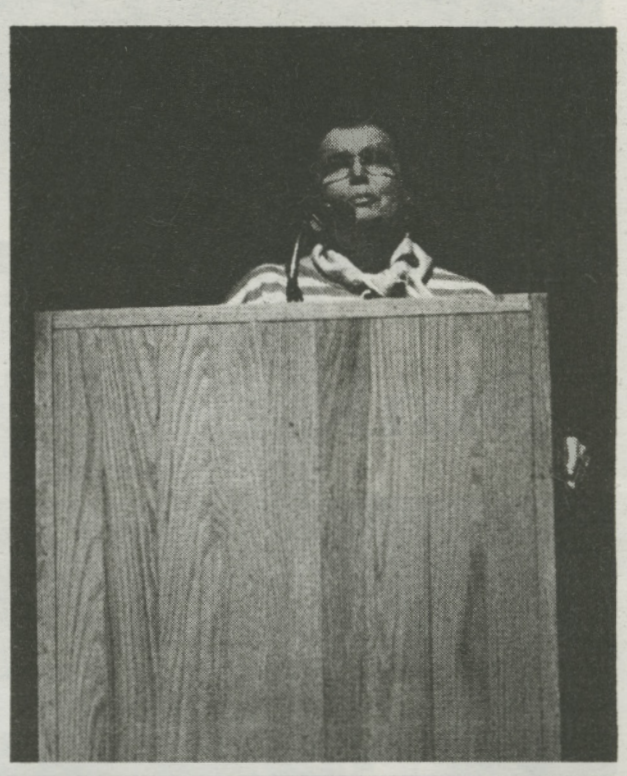
For the record, a film becomes an award-winner in the following manner: 16mm films of up to sixty minutes are submitted for competition usually between April 1 and May 1 and are entered in one of three categories: **Young Filmmaker:** to age 18, **College Filmmaker:** undergraduate or graduate student, and **Independent.** Prescreening takes place at the end of April or the first weekend in May. For the past three years Peggy Wilkerson of Nashville, freelance film art director, graphic designer, and clay animator and I (freelance picture researcher and writer, and former Media and Literary Arts Program Director for the Tennessee Arts Commission) have gone to Greeneville to watch the year's roughly 180-200 entries constantly for four to five days.

Peggy and I try to be very sensitive to the weight of our responsibilities and we know that we are to give every film every possible break. Our criteria for prescreening is simple and inclusive rather than difficult and exclusive. I look primarily for technical competence which is able to articulate a point of view. Peggy looks for cinematic sense by asking herself "Would this excite anyone about the potential and capabilities of independent film?" Although we often agree, sometimes we do not. It takes both "no" votes to reject the film prior to judging (usually approximately 20-25%). "I don't like it but I think the judges should see it," is an often spoken sentiment. Also, any judge may ask to see any film, and on one or two occasions they have chosen a film that was rejected in prescreening.

Though Mary Jane and George select the judges, neither influences their decisions. They often select films for screening which are listed as "Director's Choices" in the program. Operating independently and using $6,000 in award money, the three judges each take one-third of the prize money and then, in effect, "bid" on winning films, spending all their individual prize money and awarding any winner no less than $25. In this manner a single judge may declare any film a winner, since consensus among judges is not necessary -- except when choosing special award films.

At the end of their screening, the judges reveal their estimations and amounts awarded. If a film on reconsideration receives an inappropriately high or low aggregate dollar amount, the judges as a group may elect to readjust the total cash given to any one film. Over the last sixteen years over 3,300 films have been entered, and cash awards, purchases ($1,000 per year for the TAC) and rentals ($1/minute for award-winners) given to filmmakers have exceeded $81,273.

The credentials and caliber of experience of the judges is high. This year's group was representative of the norm: Barbara Coleson Gordon, Director of Film Programming, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; Dr. Ron Green, former Chair of the Film and Video Department, Ohio State University and of the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers; and Willard Van Dyke, distinguished still photographer and filmmaker, and former Director of the Film Department, Museum of Modern Art.



Founder and director of the Sinking Creek Film Celebration is Mary Jane Coleman. (Photo by F. Lynne Bachleda)

Films not selected are immediately returned, as are the award-winners, after the June festival so as not to tie-up precious prints too long.

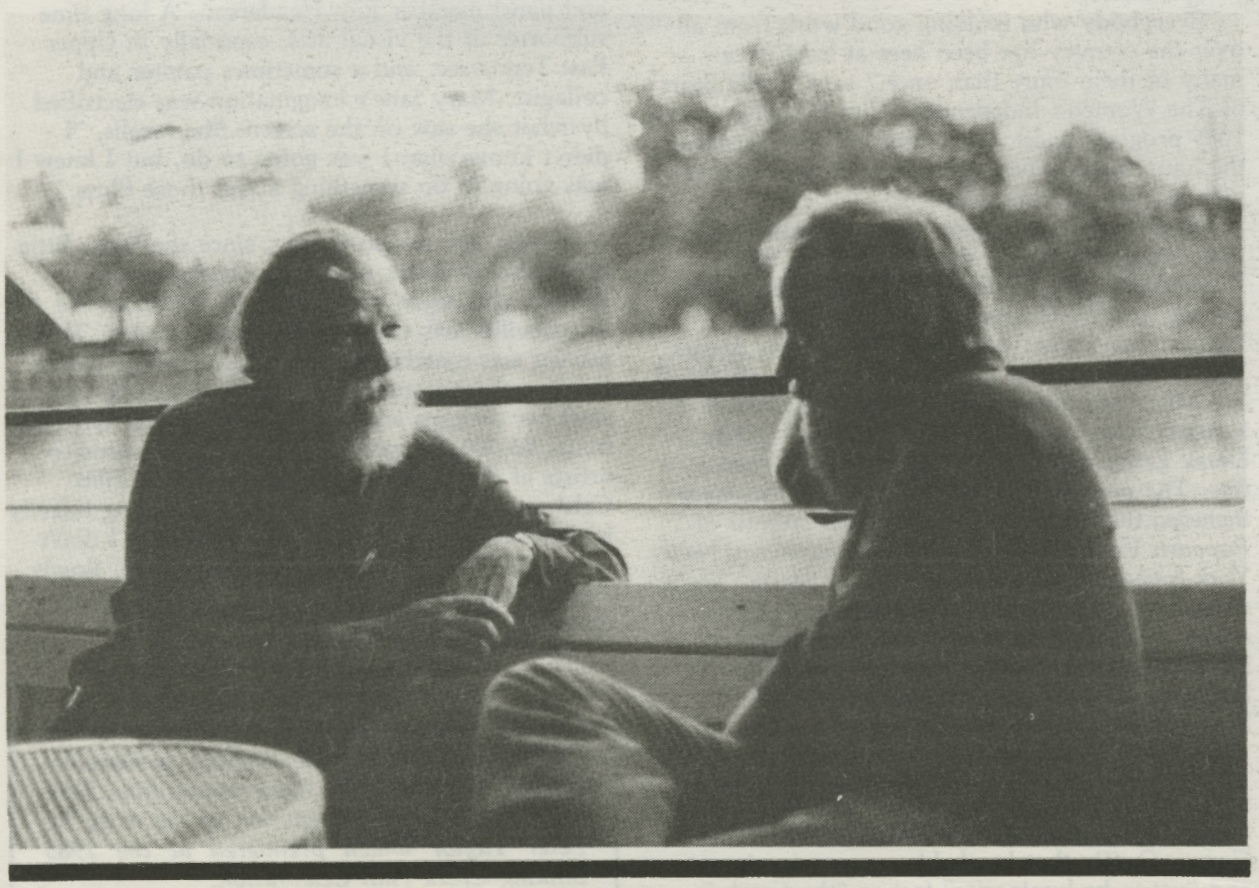
Mary Jane and George organize the winners into programs and make final arrangements for program guests, the sum total of which results in five days (Tuesday-Saturday) of non-stop, engaging film programs.

A typical day at the festival runs like this: If you're from out of town and staying in the Branscomb Quadrangle dorm (approximately $20 per night for a single), you stumble one block down a quiet street to the Sarratt Student Center. You can grab breakfast at the Rand Cafeteria, or hook some coffee and a pastry from a room off the courtyard very near the theatre. Although you're not supposed to, the Sarratt staff indulges those of us who creep down to the front row with a cup of coffee. This is at 9 A.M.--sharp! Sinking Creek is well-run and therefore it runs on time, eschewing the more laissez-faire style of some other festivals.

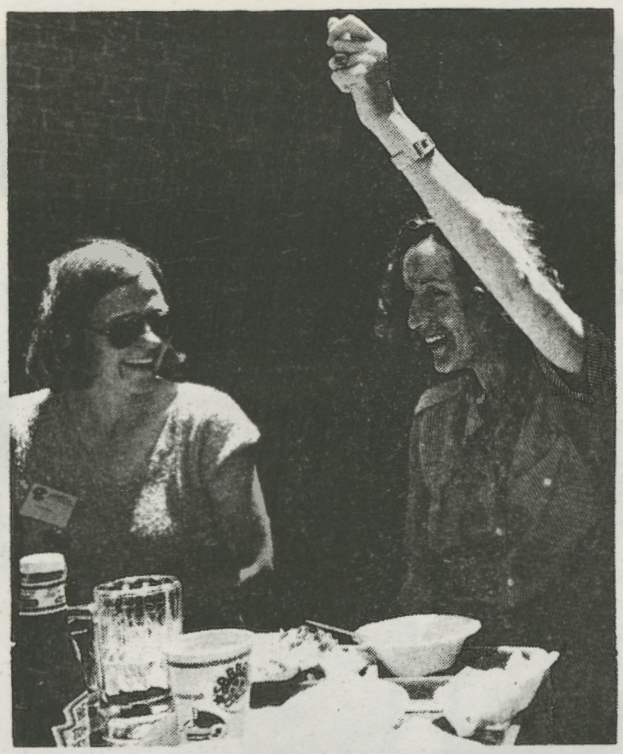
The early morning program is always comprised of award-winners of every style and subject. After a break from about 10:30 to 10:45, the late morning program often features a guest filmmaker, historian, critic or programmer. Some recent years' programs have included: Animations from the Soviet Union with Charles Samu, now Director of Short Programs for HBO; *I Remember Harlem* with Bill Miles; the Southern premiere of John Houston's *Let There Be Light;* Video Documentaries by Skip Blumberg; and Lighting by Ross Lowel, to cite only five of the roughly dozen programs given every year.

Lunch break is from noon until 2 PM and it is perhaps the best time to grab someone whose work you are interested in and head to the Overcup Oak, a beer bar and grill with terrace, atop the Sarratt Center. The 2 PM screening features more yearly award-winners or more guest programs. From 3:30 to 5:30 people scatter to various workshops and seminars.

The workshops and seminars are an integral and distinguishing feature of Sinking Creek. Whereas most other festivals screen every entry and winners are announced at the end (judging is



Video artist Ed Emshwiller (left) and film artist Pat O'Neill (right) were guests at the 1978 Sinking Creek Film Celebration.



Animator Jane DeKoven (left) and Film Director of HOTEL, NEW YORK, Jackie Raynal (right) at the 1985 Sinking Creek Film Celebration. (Photo by F. Lynne Bachleda)

simultaneous with audience screening), Sinking Creek emphasizes media education and this distinctive fact enabled it to be the first festival-type film event funded by the NEA in 1972. This year's registrants had the choices of Animation Production (Super 8), taught by Jane DeKoven and Peggy Wilkerson; Live Action Production (Super 8) taught by Gary Zeigler and Howard Hill (who also coordinates all the workshops); or Video Production taught by Mark Pleasant and Nina Frankel. Film Analysis and Criticism, which I host, is another option, which is free. The production workshops have a fee of $25 for festival registrants and $35 for all others to cover production costs. The tone of these sessions reflects the tone overall of Sinking Creek--ask if you have questions--and learn. You can attend a production workshop with a plan and experience and make a finished product. All workshop films or tapes are screened at the end of the Festival on Saturday evening at a high-spirited wine and cheese party.

If you are lucky enough to be a program guest, staff-member, or attending award-winner then you will be treated to dinner at various homes around Nashville. This element of hospitality is one of the hallmarks of Sinking Creek. It provides a rare opportunity for people from all over the country to exchange ideas, and the working connections that are made give Mary Jane and George a great deal of pleasure. Too, there is the economic consideration and every meal provided by a Nashville host is one less meal that Sinking Creek must provide.

The evening program begins at 8:15 and offers the highlights of the guests' offerings, usually with questions and answers, time permitting. This year's day and evening selections included two animation pro rams by Jules Engel of Cal Arts, New Am erican Video from the Whitney Biennial pr ented by Tom Smith of the American Fe eration of Arts -- who also screened C nmitted by Sheila McLaughlin and Lynne T lman; another version of the Frances Farmer st ory. Mark Rance, rising documentarian, brought *Leath and the Singing Telegram*, which is essentially a sequel to his Academy Award nominated short *Mom*. Mary Jane paid tribute to Stan VanDerBeek who died this year. The narrative form was well-served by Jackie Raynal's very funny *Hotel New York*, Steven J. Ross' Memphis period piece, *The Old Forest*, and *American Autobahn* which starred Memphis actress Jan Jalenak. Linda Klosky rounded out the program with her experimental work, which is reminiscent of David Rimmer's films.

By now your eyes and maybe your brain have tried to absorb "grillions" of images, but the day isn't over. Frequently there is a late show commencing at 10:15 or 10:30 where the more "off-beat" or films of questionable taste, often the most delightful from a non-salacious point of view, are screened. Then, you're dumped out into the night at about midnight or later and you have about eight or nine hours before it all begins again. If this sounds arduous, in some ways it is, but it is also simply wonderful and inspiring to be able to see some of the newest and best 16mm work in the country and to meet with some of the people who are responsible for it.

In essence, Mary Jane curates each year's guest programs. It is her taste and curiosity that is projected on the screen. Her criteria for program guests are three-fold: highest quality, a variety of narratives, animations, experimental works and documentaties, and most important, an ability and willingness on the part of the guest to enter into the festival and communicate with people, to be accessible. This attribute is critical.

"My concern for the filmmakers influences everything I do," she maintains. That being true, her second concern is the creation of an atmosphere that encourages people to ask any question, even the most basic or obvious one. She clearly remembers how she felt when she was beginning to learn, and she and George, as "drummers for the independent cinema," know that if the audience for this work is to increase and thereby benefit the artists, learning at all levels must occur.

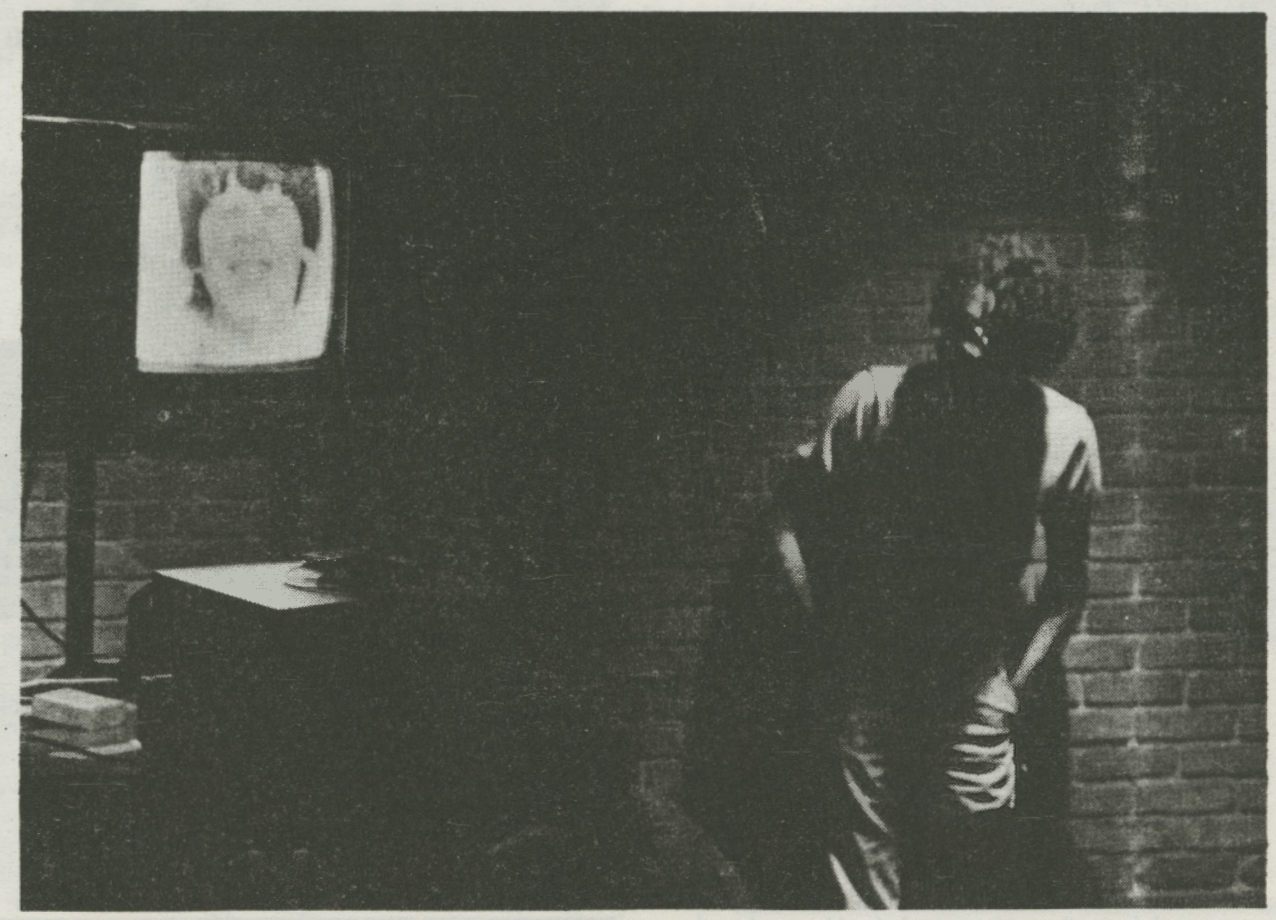
The issue of video is timely now for Sinking Creek and is tied to the larger discussion of Sinking Creek's finances and therefore its future. Although video has swept the country in some senses and it is common for festivals to include video and film entries, Sinking Creek has held fast to film entries only. In the past two or three years Mary Jane has added video program guests and video production workshops, but video entries are still under debate. Primarily it is a point, perhaps a breaking point, of economics, with rental of video equipment being quite costly.

Mary Jane estimates that video entries would raise their yearly hard cash (exclusive of in-kind contributions) operating expenses of $90,000 by about one-third. "I would not want to short-change the filmmakers in favor of the video artists or vice versa," she says. "I would want to bring video in at the same level with its own set of judges and cash awards." Speaking strictly for himself and not as the official voice of Sinking Creek, George Griffin feels that Sinking Creek should probably continue to do what it does well, and that is 16mm film. He expresses regret at the national decline in student film production because Sinking Creek has always worked hard to foster student work.

Raising that $90,000 cash is a yearly obligation, and if Mary Jane received any salary (she never has) it would realistically increase that obligation by at least $25,000 per year. The question of what will happen to Sinking Creek "after Mary Jane" is one that occurs to people close to it, and as a realistic, practical 61 year old she knows that plans need to be made for eventual new leadership. She sees George Griffin, former assistant director, now co-director, as the key to any administrative transition. Naturally, having founded the Sinking Creek Film Celebration and given seventeen years to directing its projects (a total of 8 including the festival), she is well aware that continuity in direction is essential to Sinking Creek's continued quality and success, as it is with any organization.

At present the Lyndhurst Foundation, the NEA, the Tennessee Arts Commission, Vanderbilt University, and fund-raising event called *Film Flams* in Upper East Tennessee and Nashville primarily support Sinking Creek. That is a fairly broad base of support, but a somewhat tenuous one, resting primarily on grants which can come and go. What Sinking Creek needs and richly deserves is a benefactor or benefactors to establish an endowment so that yearly operating expenses are assured. Sinking Creek, and thereby independent filmmakers, already have in effect one fairy godmother in Mary Jane. Finding another with money seems not much more improbable for an event of such extraordinary quality.

F. Lynne Bachleda is a Nashville freelancer whose specialty is picture research. She has co-ordinated Sinking Creek's Film Analysis Seminar for several years and is former Literary Arts and Media Program Director for the Tennessee Arts Commisson.



Videomaker Mark Pleasant screens a video workshop production at the 1985 Sinking Creek Film Celebration. (Photo by F. Lynne Bachleda)

Reviews

Opening Night At Sinking Creek

Beverly Moore as Lee Ann Deehart, an independent, working class woman in Stephen John Ross' feature film, THE OLD FOREST.

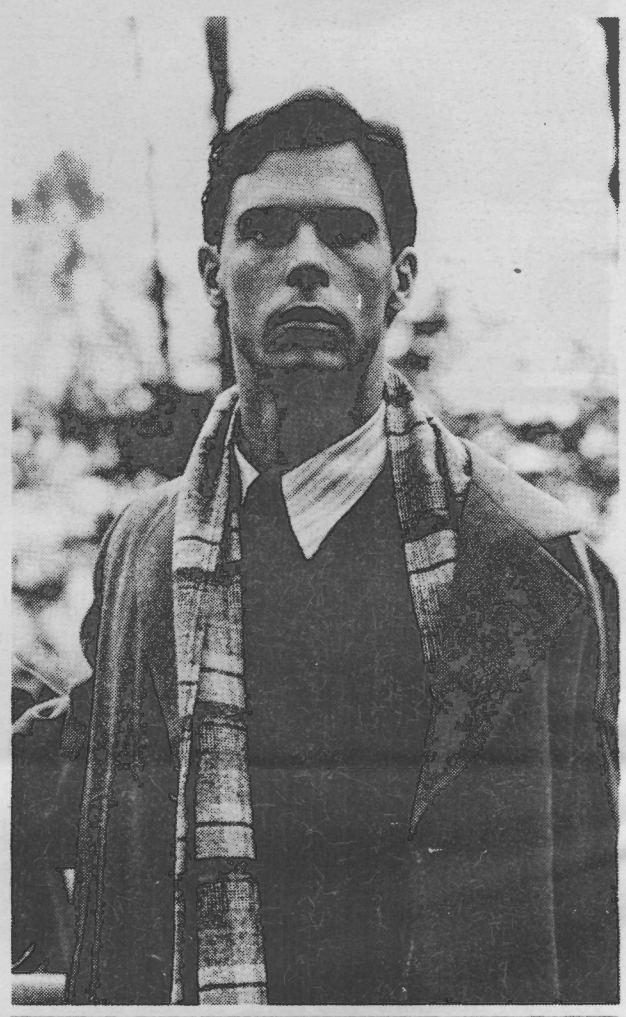
The story of *The Old Forest* is deceptively simple -- as is the way with life in the South. Set in Memphis in the late 1930's, it tells the tale of Nat Ramsey, son of a well-to-do cotton broker and ersatz Latin scholar; his engagement to Caroline Braxley, a blonde of like caste; and his relationship with a certain Lee Ann Deehart, one of those "independent" girls of the times who is making her own way in the world.

The film opens with Nat and Caroline's engagement. The wedding is imminent, or as imminent as such logistical social nightmares can be. But Nat and his confreres, like all good Southern boys bound for domestication, continues to enjoy the company of Lee Ann and her free-spirited friends. These "girls" -- young working women who live on their own -- offer the novelty of good conversation, frivolity and palely risque fun. The boys, inheritors of an effete chivalric code, delude themselves in the foolish belief that their "friendships" are purely paternalistic.

The problem arises one snowy day shortly before the wedding when Nat and Lee Ann are involved in a minor auto accident, and Lee Ann - for what prove to be highly personal reasons -- escapes into the mist and entanglements of the old forest.

Lee Ann's disappearance, and eventual recovery by an unlikely source, precipitates crises both social and psychological. The young people involved are as well compelled to confront the motives underlying their actions -- a difficult confrontation in a social order where action is dictated by tradition. Lives and assumptions are accordingly changed.

Peter Taylor's short story was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1979. In published interviews,



Peter White as Nat Ramsey is the son of a well-to-do cotton broker in THE OLD FOREST.

Martha H. DuBose

THE OLD FOREST. Steven John Ross. 1984. 16mm. Color. Sound. 57m.

AMERICAN AUTOBAHN. Andre Degas. 1984. 16mm. Color. Sound. 57m.

The best news about Steven John Ross' hour-long film of *The Old Forest* is that it is Tennessee-made with Tennessee money -- about a hundred thousand dollars' worth with the lion's share from the Tennessee Committee for the Humanities and other non-profit sources. So the independent Southern cinema can take heart.

Almost as refreshing is the fact that this Tennessee film contains not one single reference to country music, beer, dirt roads or backwoods in-breeding. The characters who populate *The Old Forest* are of a different breed altogether, and one infrequently depicted outside the pages of Southern writers like Peter Taylor, on whose short story the film is based.

Filmmaker Ross, a transplanted Easterner who now teaches at Memphis State University, has made a praiseworthy attempt to translate an elegant example of Southern narrative fiction to the screen. He deals with a time, a place and a class of Southerners -- Memphians of the upper crust -- distinct from the spiritually enervated types derived from Tennessee Williams and as far removed from Boss Hogg and the Hazzards as Charlotte Russe is from instant Jello.

A 1937 Memphis cotton classing room is one of the settings for a scene in Stephen John Ross' THE OLD FOREST.

both Taylor and Ross have noted the faithfulness of the screenplay to the original, with dialogue left virtually intact. And in this faith lies the film's major flaw.

Ross approaches his story with an eye heavily influenced by the BBC-Granada-et al British television style in drama -- as a period piece revealed in soft focus, watery colors, and finely observed physical detailing. (In fact, Ross' penchant for propping scenes with vintage autos frequently threatens to throw his whole film off-balance, as a Jaguar commercial is inevitably out of kilter with reality.)

Atmospherics are fine, when they garnish a film. But in *The Old Forest,* these embellishments are too often asked to carry the film and to mask deeper problems in character development and pacing.

Ross has drawn his cast from Memphis talent, and in several of the secondary parts, the director is served better than he serves. But in the lead roles -- Peter White as Nat, Jane Wallace as Caroline and Beverly Moore as Lee Ann -- inexperience, exacerbated by the lack of strong direction, hobbles the film as a whole. These young actors suffer not so much from a talent shortage as camera shyness: they fail to connect with the camera so their characters fail to connect with us.

Because it is a traditional narrative film, *The Old Forest* depends on characterization and narrative flow. Here, however, Ross the adaptor's reverence for his source material fails Ross the filmmaker. The words may be true to text, but their delivery is hesitant. Peter Taylor's monotonal voiceover narration compounds the problem.

The pacing, which could have been portentous, is merely slow. And there is a troublesome tendency in the editing to linger too long over a handsome visual at the expense of plot progression. In the end, while the viewer may want to know how the story turns out, there's little to make us wonder why. (An unnecessary little coda, imposed over one last beauty shot, sums up life after the incident all too neatly.) The primal feeling, like the primal forest that is the film's central metaphor, is hinted at but never fully aroused.

In selecting *The Old Forest* -- and perhaps because he has worked so closely with the story's author -- Ross has run headlong into the classic dilemma faced by all moviemakers who choose to film literature. He has chosen to be literate at the expense of being cinematic. The result is a well-crafted but basically passionless film.

American Autobahn is another story.

This film was selected, together with *The Old Forest,* for the opening night of this year's Sinking Creek Film Celebration. The reason, according to Sinking Creek Director, Mary Jane Coleman, was the performance of Memphis-born actress Jan Jalenak.

Reason enough.

Jalenak is plainly a talent to be reckoned with. Alternately wry and knowing and poignantly innocent, she breathes a great deal of life and freshness into this noir tale of a quasi-gangster on the lam.

The story you've seen many times before, and infinitely better. New York-based filmmaker Andre Degas has plundered the genre, plucking bits and pieces from the masters, and blundered through the saga of a German journalist from New York who may or may not have been involved in a gang slaying, who may be a heartless killer (unless, of course, he's an innocent victim), and who could or could not really care for the restless young mechanic he picks up on his drive through the American hinterlands (i.e. various locales around Memphis).

The film is a mess of influences -- a little Peckinpah, some Sam Fuller, some Godard, a heavy dash of New German Cinema etc. I'm told it was originally twice its present 57-minute length, and that may account for some of the quirks. (The editing certainly has an angry edge.)

But through the clutter, Jan Jalenak shines. Like the young Ida Lupino, Jalenak consistently balances on that edge between toughness and vulnerability. Her face, malleable as Play Doh, ranges through emotions with believable ease, and it is a mark of her skill that her character survives the film. A performance, and a name to remember.

Otto envisions life in Mexico as a bulfighter in a scene from Andre Degas's AMERICAN AUTOBAHN.

For information on *The Old Forest,* contact Steven J. Ross, Department of Theatre/Communication Arts, Memphis State University, Memphis, TN 38152. *American Autobahn:* Andre Degas, 1313 W. 54 Street #5E, New York, NY 10019.

Martha DuBose was formerly film critic for THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD newspaper in Sydney, Australia, and is now an advertising writer and broadcast producer in her hometown of Nashville.

Memphis-born Jan Jalenak is a young mechanic in Andre Degas' AMERICAN AUTOBAHN.

The Southeast Media Fellowship Program

Independent film and video makers in the ten-state region of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia are eligible to apply to the third round of the Southeast Media Fellowship Program. A three-member panel of film and video experts will award grants of up to $5000 for the production of new works or works-in-progress, and seven film/video/audio equipment access grants through the South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center. The application deadline is February 1, 1986. The grants will be announced by March 15, 1986.

The Southeast Media Fellowship Program is coordinated by Appalshop, the media cooperative in Whitesburg, Ky., and is one of seven regional fellowship programs funded by the Media Program of the National Endowment for the Arts in conjunction with the American Film Institute. The program is designed to recognize the geographic and artistic diversity of the media community and to encourage the growth of the media arts throughout the country. For an application form for the Southeast Media Fellowship Program write to: SEMFP c/o Appalshop, Box 743, Whitesburg, Ky. 41858, (606) 633-0108.

Hotel New York

Jackie Raynal is both director and actress in her feature film HOTEL NEW YORK, a wacky, surreal comedy about a wonderful, odd couple.

Clare Bratten Simon

HOTEL NEW YORK. Jackie Raynal. 1984. 16mm. Color and B&W. Sound. 60m. Zanzibar Productions.

The auditorium was packed and muggy with the combined body heat of the crowd when two self-styled punk nihilists showed up with about 340 others for Jackie Raynal's screening of *Hotel New York* -- a part of the Sinking Creek Film Festival. Raynal wore a gold antique blouse. The two men wore sunglasses and turned up collars on black jackets -- despite the warmth of the Nashville night and the fact that they were already in a dark place -- Vanderbilt University's Sarratt Cinema.

At the end of enthusiastic applause for the screening, the audience stayed for a polite round of questioning. Unexpectedly, one of the young men walked down to the podium where Mme. Raynal stood. While his friend stood to applaud in a mechanical and robotic style, the man, in a mock serious tone, said he wished to present her with a token of his esteem for her art. Though the gift (a broken beer bottle) was hostile and the companion's shouted critique ("Your art is bullshit.") startling, Raynal was unflappable. She thanked the man for his gift and calmly turned to answer questions from the audience. It is not the first time her work has been so violently received. One man came up to her after a screening and slapped her face.

Such incidents are both comic and astonishing -- because Raynal's film is not a serious political statement or even a self-proclaimed work of art. It is a droll commentary on the pretensions of life in New York and in fact, this incident closely paralleled a scene from Raynal's film on the hostile audiences with intellectual pretensions.

Hotel New York is a tongue-in-cheek, somewhat autobiographical film by the French filmmaker on life in New York City. In it, she mocks the absurdities and difficulties of New York art and film scene, American styled marriage and perhaps, most difficult of all, finding an apartment in the now fashionable Soho district.

Raynal has the credentials to try her hand at independent filmmaking. She had established herself in France as a film editor, working with directors such as Eric Rohmer, Jean-Daniel Pollet and Jean Luc Godard. In New York, when she's not working on a film, she programs films for the Carnegie Hall and Bleecker Street cinemas -- two small art houses owned and operated by her husband Sid Geffen.

Hotel New York's original incarnation (called *New York Story* and shot in 1980) was a shorter black and white film focusing on American style marriage. This segment now serves as the last half of the film. The shorter version was selected at international festivals such as Rotterdam, Edinburgh, London, Hong Kong and Melbourne and received some recognition -- including a cash prize from Melbourne. Eventually, Raynal was able to finance the rest of the film.

The title *Hotel New York* was inspired by an incident in which her neighborhood laundry disappeared with the overnight demolition of the building in which it was housed. Vanishing along with it, leaving no trace, were her bedsheets, lost in the dislocated and perpetual shuffle of a transitory New York. The building, like some rougish guest in a hotel, had checked out overnight, taking her laundry with it and leaving no forwarding address.

Raynal herself stars as Loulou, a French filmmaker who comes to live in New York. The film opens (in color) with Loulou in the subway, getting off at the Soho stop and pounding on a warehouse door to inquire about an apartment within. The "apartment" is actually a closet-sized alcove in a big communal space. Raynal's tiny closet has been rented out by her landlord as storage for books. She must also share her alcove with a Harley Davidson which cannot be moved and eventually becomes a place to hang clothing. As a part of the larger communal space are two lesbian members of an all woman rock band, and a landlord with a penchant for power tools.

With the all important apartment problem solved, Loulou starts to screen her film in hopes of landing a job as a director. The snobbery and callousness of New York and the larger reality of needing money forces Loulou to accept a job as an editor of "romantic" gay pornographic films. Meanwhile, she continues to lobby for acceptance in New York as a serious director. Her film is screened in the Museum of Modern Art to a handful of intellectual cultists who are critical and insist on their own interpretation of the "obvious" symbolism and statement made by her work. She fends off the rancor and convoluted theories of her humorless critics with a wry wit and deadpan style -- finally being forced to discuss the "reality" of a urination scene in her film. The only thing lacking in her crowd of critics were two punk-styled nihilists with a broken beer bottle.

Finally a bored television executive, played by Sid Geffen, Raynal's real-life husband, invites Loulou to lunch and to direct a film based on a play written by his son, Gary Indiana. Sid hopes that Loulou will capture Gary's interest and cure him of his obvious homosexuality. The project is doomed from the start by Gary's own unwillingness to sway from his sexual preferences. At the end of the evening, when he leaves to go to a gay bar, Loulou stays behind and romance blooms between the French filmmaker and the American television producer.

The film abruptly changes to black and white, perhaps a commentary on the boredom of their marriage, but certainly, the beginning of the shorter film within a film. The quality of the black and white image is poor -- perhaps intentionally. Like the television screen which Loulou watches during the inertia of her marriage, the image is grainy, without enough contrast. The color portion of the film is more classically shot by Babette Mangolte with lighting that falls somewhere short of the too obvious high key colors of the typical comedic film.

Though the script was conceived and written by Raynal, actor/writer Gary Indiana wrote the dialogue. Raynal delights in showing us the absurdities of life in New York, but it is Indiana's dialogue which makes the commentary droll.

As director of her film, Raynal manages to sustain a light touch and wit which complements her deadpan, slightly bewildered style of acting. Raynal, mocking the use of symbols in serious films, invents one of her own. It is a giant meatball.

Loulou: I dreamed about a meatball.

Sid: A meatball?

Loulou: Yes, I dreamed about the meatball all night, and at the end of the dream I realized that my meatball was to symbolize all the desire I have for another man. Can you believe what kind of situation I'm in now?

Sid: A meatball! Another man? What do you mean? That's being unfaithful.

Raynal also has another film within a film. It is a glimpse of an old film on her television set where we spy Sid, in lavish sideburns and a sporty hat, rolling his eyes and wielding a golf club in the style of silent film comedies.

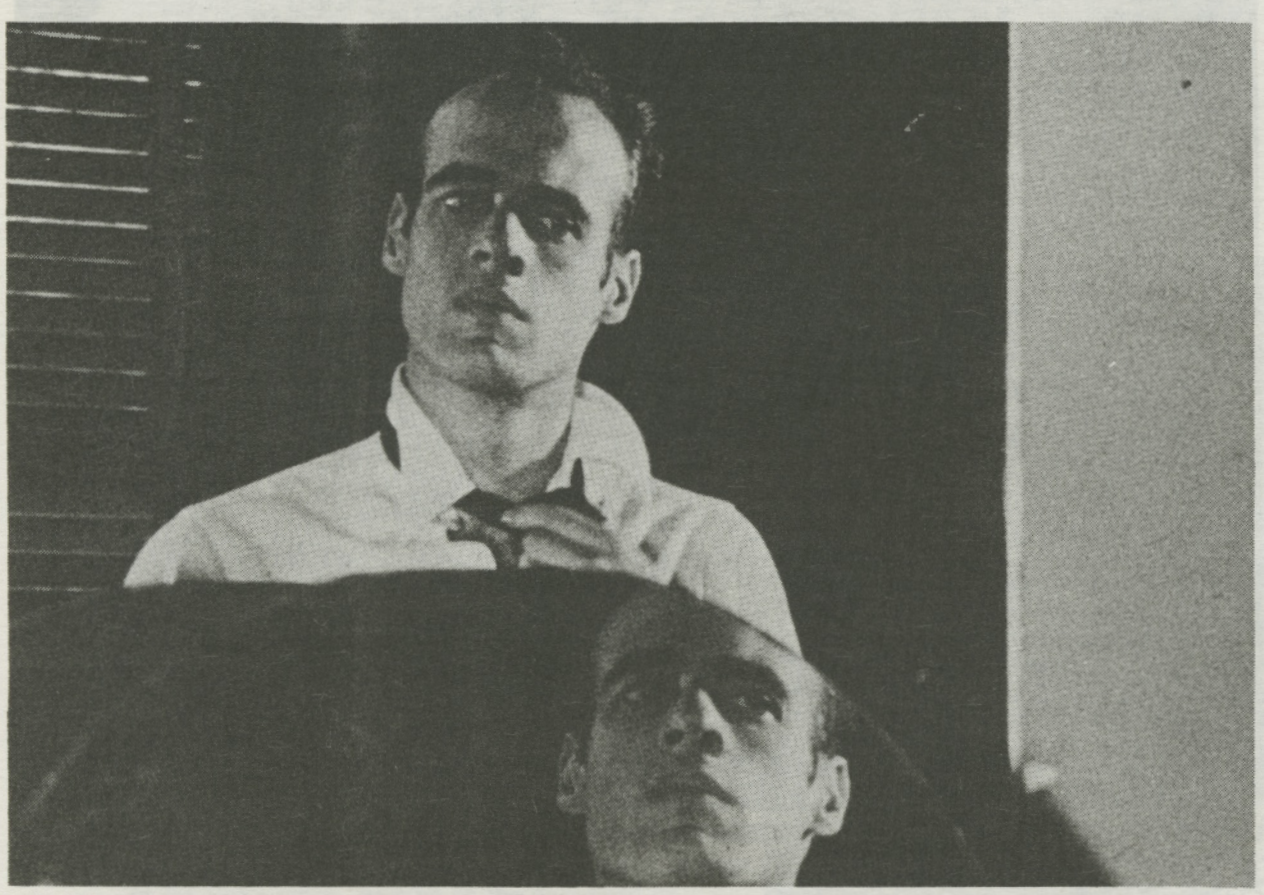
Hotel New York comes to a crashing and sudden conclusion which is startling, funny and ridiculous. (It has something to do with the symbolic meatball as well.) But Raynal's film light heartedly mocks itself, along with its other targets, so the ending is appropriately hilarious. Raynal explains it this way "I hope you do not think there is some terrible symbolism in that I kill my husband off, but I ran out of money and had to end the film."

For further information contact: Zanzibar Productions, Jackie Raynal, 40 Central Park South, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Clare Bratten Simon was formerly Director of Public Relations for Sinking Creek Film Celebration and is film reviewer for a public radio station in Nashville, Tennessee.

A still from Jackie Raynal's feature film, HOTEL NEW YORK.

The Films Of David Williams



A still from David Williams' film, SHADOWS.

Joan Strommer

SHADOWS. David Williams. 1982. 16mm. B&W. Sound. 5m.

DREAMS IN THE NIGHT. David Williams. 1983. 16mm. B&W. Sound. 12m.

WOMAN IN THE WINDOW. David Williams. 1984. 16mm. B&W. Sound. 11m.

THE LAST OF SUMMER. David Williams. 1985. 16mm. B&W. Sound. 14m.

The films of David Williams invite personal interpretation. In three of his films, archetypal images allude to meanings particular to each viewers' response. These images describe existential states: *Shadows*, a confrontation with the limits of a creative self; *Dreams In The Night*, a confrontation with society's expectations and the self; and, *Woman In The Window*, a confrontation with the transience of life, contained in an image of a woman's face looking forward, backward and straight on at herself. Fear of the dark region of guilt-ridden memories and anticipated encounters is drawn on her face. David's involvement with an imagined feminine struggle ultimately deciphers mysteries relevant to his own search for self-knowledge.

The confrontation in *Shadows* is that of a young man on the edge of assuming the responsibilities of a man in society.

> *The scream has stopped. He allowed the light to return. The last few steps remain and then the past will be gone forever.*

The man shuts himself in a house, closes the blinds, and in the dark begins an inward search. He assesses and fortifies a naked self before putting on the "white shirt and tie" of manhood. Fear of the expectations that the white shirt and tie impose cause him to scream. The film reminds me of the "ritual of passage" themes of all cultures: men painting, transforming, and enhancing their naked bodies or disguising and protecting them when the role of manhood is assumed.

But this rite of passage is personalized so that withdrawal seems to be a universal experience. These are times of vulnerability and honesty, times to be shut in the dark and confronted by mirrored, doubled images of self. The style is of quick, fragmented editing, breaking apart and reassembling. Close-ups confront us with a claustrophobic self absorption and the fear of inadequacy. Vulnerability, failure, emotional instability, unsureness are all unmanly attributes, undeniable in both men and women The telephone is not picked up. The doors are shut. It is a private struggle. Society is impatient with the reality of personal metamorphosis.

The time we share with the character in *Shadows* is paced by the percussive sound of doors shutting, of woodblocks, and an intense, high-pitched screech. All of David's soundtracks remind me of the internal workings of the mind rather than sounds created on recognizable instruments. Intense emotions diffuse and reduce a sound into a background texture. *Shadows*, *Dreams In The Night*, and *Woman In The Window* all end with treatment of light and dark in their ending shots. In *Shadows*, the young man puts on his white shirt and opens the door to a world of darkness. The darkness could represent a world that receives only an incomplete man (unsatisfactory to David's concept of wholeness) -- which would allow for admission of weakness. This is the darkest of his three films with the most unredeeming indictment of society.

In *Woman In The Window*, David explores a woman's flight into past, present, and future in another rite of passage treatment. She sets aside a doll, embraced by her aged persona. The doll represents the image of women's need to remain forever young and lovely. The old woman is unable to part with the old values but the young woman's inner tensions force her to reject the doll and the values it embodies. She sees a child. This child of her past is free and smiling. The past cannot be recovered and the present is unbearable as the future is deadened by the reality of her own aging and loss of power and desirability. She assumes no redemption from her fate as she closes the curtain in the final frame. A curious difference from the other films is how David introduced the woman's search as happening in the daylight, implying that women face confrontations more directly.

In the soundtrack of *Woman In The Window* a time clock ticking is quietly introduced as the woman searches after the haunting sound of a crying baby located in a backyard shed. She enters the shed as if something in the present is becoming undeniable. Does the clock signal us to judge her anxiety as a confrontation with some guilt regarding her responsibilities as a mother, or her denial of the role of motherhood? The shed is entered. Perhaps it is the dark place of birthing and marks the loss of this woman's identity, or of the baby itself. It is amazing how the sparseness and languidness of the images can solicit this interpretation among the wealth of many possibilities. One is taken into the void of the shed to search also for a hidden cry, something left behind, some unfinished business.

A still from David Williams' film WOMAN IN THE WINDOW.

The man in *Dreams In The Night*, explicity states that he is:

> *At the entrace way, where there are strange landscapes, in the land without dreams, the make believe land.*

David shows us a city landscape with oppressive and massive structures and calls this the unreality where the scale is larger than life and where society makes up its own truths from untruths, thereby perceived as "the make-believe land."

A black man pauses in landscapes, often submissively, until the end of the film when he raises his body, rejects what is unattainable as undesirable, puts on a white shirt and coat, and descends the stairs to hard and cold reality. He is fortified, confident, and unshakable. His gestures of compliance in the "make-believe land" are no longer appropriate (his form out-of-focus in the end frame as he transcends into light). We come to identify with the character's release from the dream that limits his life. At one point a hand grips an ornamental post and at the end of the film the tension of the hand's grip is released, the energies better directed, as the man assumes his strength, a strength taken away by the myths created in the "make-believe land." Darkness and blackness are places of freedom and assessment so that the black man is the freest character with a future to fulfill once he asserts his place in it.

A still from David Williams' film, DREAMS IN THE NIGHT.

His current work in progress, *The Last Of Summer*, will perhaps conclude this personal diary. The text is rich and the characters ripen to full potential. The woman, introduced in *Woman In The Window*, reappears and attracts the attention of the young man. Dressed in a white shirt and tie, he finds himself in the lush foliage of the forest. An old man stops at its edge. Children also gaze into its depths, but it is only the young man and woman who enter. We again see the black man who seems at one point to know the way. Suddenly the young man appears frozen behind a window with the stifling sound of summer insects rising. He has become one with this environment and is unreachable. The young man enters a house first with a young woman, then reenters again alone. We also see a "mother" image accepting a child's gift of a shell, and again watching and accepting the choices and discoveries of the young man. In this sequence David reviews his family relationships.

David has incorporated the black man, the woman, and the young man's nature within himself. He sees himself as a watcher; he hesitates, he considers, he sees clearly how it looks and how it is. The films are wise and contemplative, the gestures are everyday. David admits that the deeper tone of this content is entirely in the hands of the spectator. He broadly scripts the films and edits them with attention to the flow and connections of the images rather than any of the political, autobiographical texts that I impose by my interpretation.

How do the films work out their messages in such sensitive ways? Is the nature of the characters, the actual actors, the black man, the young woman, the old woman, the young man, so transparent and so openly scripted that the actors themselves pull together nonverbal messages in their own personas? David follows their cues as he edits and connects the best of their improvisations and wanderings through the landscapes. He recognizes something which we in turn internalize. Something inexplicable happens in shooting, reshooting, building the "story," connecting and discarding, bringing the essence of the images closer and allowing the images the transparency of non-interpretation so that they live healthy lives in our own minds.

In the precision of the editing and the imprecision of the "voice," the characters move slowly through well-composed landscapes (with tortured expression). Interpretation of an inner struggle is each person's private confrontation. David reveals the following in a conversation:

> My main concern is with pacing, slowing people down. I try to tell them about the mood I want... the expression is up to them but directing the movement is up to me... the idea is to get the right kind of expression with the right movement.

A still from David Williams' film THE LAST OF SUMMER.

The characters confront but the audience is also confronted by the varied meanings that emerge from their light and dark regions.

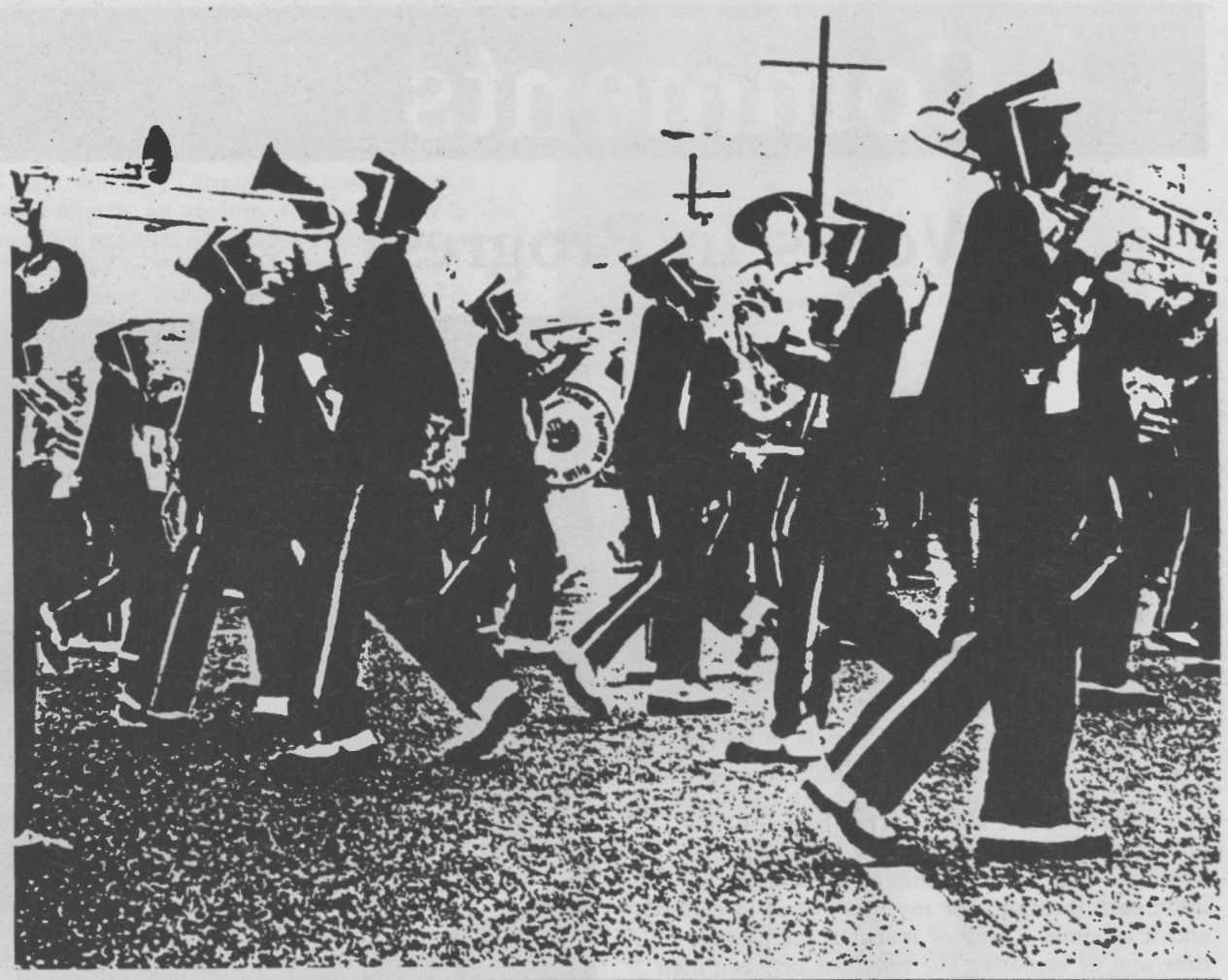
Dreams In The Night, by David Williams won The Silver Hugo Award at the Chicago International Film Festival, 1983. The film won prizes at Sinking Creek Film Festival and 1st Chicago Experimental Film Festival, 1984. *Shadows* and *Dreams In The Night* were also shown at the Ann Arbor Film Festival, 1983-84, and *Shadows* was shown again at Thomas Edison Film Festival, 1983. *The Last Of Summer* was funded by the 1984 Southeast Media Fellowship Program. For information contact: David Williams, 4812 Park Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23226, 804/359-0562.

Joan Strommer teaches film production, and film history courses at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, where she is an Assistant Professor in the Photography/Film Dept.

Get Down Street Sound

Louis Alvarez

GET DOWN STREET SOUND. Neil Alexander and Larry Travis; camera, Neil Alexander; editor, Larry Travis. 1984. ¾" video. B/W. Sound. 29m.



A still from Neil Alexander and Larry Travis' video, GET DOWN STREET SOUND. (Photo by James Peddecord)

In New Orleans, a city obsessed with music, the role of the high school marching band is extremely important. In other cities, bands may be important for drumming up school spirit at the halftime of football games, or for serenading the occasional Congressperson at the opening of a new freeway ramp. In New Orleans, however, high school bands provide the music for the most important event on the city's cultural calendar: Carnival, better known as Mardi Gras. During the three weeks that precede Lent, over five dozen elaborate parades wend their way through the streets of the city, and in between the giant floats dedicated to *Legends of the Silver Screen, America the Beautiful,* and *Famous Louisiana Products,* dozens of marching bands from New Orleans and suburbs blow their horns and strut their stuff. Some bands are legendary: the performance of St. Augustine High School's Marching One Hundred, representing New Orleans' most elite black Catholic school, is a frequent conversational topic at Carnival time, and leading parades vie for St. Aug's participation. And every New Orleanian, native or adopted, undergoes a peculiar quickening of the pulse when, rushing to the parade route, they hear the first distant sounds of the slightly-off-key brass section of a band mixed with the cheers of a crowd and the tinkling of Mardi Gras necklaces being thrown from the floats. The parade is coming!

This is the cultural backdrop for *Get Down Street Sound,* a new videotape by still photographer Neil Alexander and TV news cameraperson Larry Travis. For their first documentary together, Alexander and Travis have produced an infectiously upbeat, high-powered profile of the Alcee Fortier High School Band of New Orleans. The Fortier Band is not the best band in New Orleans; to my ears they sound distinctly second-rate. But that's not the point. *Get Down Street Sound* is interested in the process of becoming a band, and in the fact that most of the players are low-income black teenagers whose band experience may be the high point of their educational experience as well as a strong basis for personal pride.

Alexander and Travis have chosen a fairly straightforward documentary approach utilizing both verité footage and interviews. The key figure in the documentary, as in the band itself, is the Music Director, Elijah Brimmer, Jr. Called "a second daddy" by his charges, Brimmer cajoles, threatens, instructs, and illustrates in his efforts to shape a parade quality musical ensemble. (Some of the most appealing material in the tape depicts Brimmer demonstrating marching routines to rows of band members in the school's courtyard.) For the first half of the program, Brimmer's voice-overs provide us with the necessary background information: the makeup of the band, its importance to the school, his philosophies of teaching. We see the band members picking up their uniforms and practicing their instruments and marching steps. Then it's out onto the streets as the Fortier Band marches in their first parade of the Mardi Gras season.

The second half of *Get Down Street Sound* concentrates on the students' attitudes towards being in the band. Alexander and Travis have assembled a garland of brief interviews with a variety of band members, which illustrates, charmingly, the importance of the band in the students' lives. A group of girls stress the importance of hanging tough in the face of chauvinism from their male colleagues. Others talk about the self-discipline that arises from their band participation, or simply vent their feelings about Fortier's crosstown rival, John McDonogh High School, a competition which produces record crowds at Fortier-McDonogh football games--not for the athletics, but for the battle of the marching bands. As the tape draws to a close, the students turn in their band uniforms and instruments at the end of the school year. The air is thick with dejection, a touching reminder of the innate sentimentality of most high school students.

Get Down Street Sound is rich with small incidents: a couple of drum majors rehearse a routine on their own time in front of the school; bandleader Brimmer disciplines a recalcitrant student in a scene destined to remind viewers of their own high schol years; the percussion section winds up by unloosing an anti-McDonogh chant ("Trojans Don't Bother Me") in the timeworn cadences of black New Orleans street calling.

Although it is always entertaining, *Get Down Street Sound* shares a conceptual problem common to many first videotapes: a certain redundancy in the way its scenes and themes are laid out. By sticking close to the schoolrooms and the parades, Alexander and Travis have narrowed their scope to the point where our relationship to the material stays pretty much at the same level throughout. As a result, after about twenty minutes, nothing really new is being offered--just more glimpses of the band's performances and personnel. This may be another case of the tyranny of PBS format (28 minute and 58 minute lengths for programs that could be briefer); in any case, this is less of a problem with *Street Sound* than it is with some other shows, because this one has an incredible amount of raw energy and good humor going for it, with Alexander and Travis keeping a light touch throughout. Lack of pretension can be its own reward.

Visually the show is capably shot, with some memorable high points: an over-the-shoulder shot of bandleader Brimmer as he yells instructions out a fourth floor window to the assembled formations in the yard below; a slow zoom-in of band columns marching in formation that is striking in its abstraction; and the final fade-out on two silent, tearful drum majors who realize that their band days have come to an end is a wonderful contemplative moment. Although occasionally choppy, the program's editing is tight; the sound has its fuzzy moments, but that reflects the wide variety of shooting locations and is not an impediment to viewing.

Perhaps *Get Down Street Sound*'s most audacious action is the fact that it's in black and white. Although he originally shot the tape in color (using a JVC KY-2700 camera), Alexander chose to exhibit in black and white because, he says, he wanted to create a certain "timelessness"--the feeling of looking at high school yearbook photographs which could have been taken in 1965, 1975, or 1985. Alexander and Travis have certainly evoked a sense of the generic urban American high school: scenes such as one of the band marching down Fortier's main stairwell could, with only minor changes, have happened at my Midwestern high school fifteen years ago. At the same time, however, one wants to see color, particularly in the exterior shots of the band marching. (For veterans of the days of half-inch reel-to-reel video, *Get Down Street Sound* provides an eerie reminder of the way most videotapes used to look.)

All in all, *Get Down Street Sound* is a worthy addition to the small but growing canon of documentaries about aspects of New Orleans folk customs, and one awaits Alexander and Travis' next venture with anticipation. *Get Down Street Sound* can be enjoyed by virtually any audience; I would think that it would appeal especially to groups of high school students (whether in bands or not) for its universal portrait of school life. *Get Down Street Sound* is available on ¾" video from Neil Alexander, 1503 Tchoupitoulas St., New Orleans, LA 70130.

Louis Alvarez is a writer and independent videomaker; he has just completed (with Andrew Kolker) YEAH YOU RITE! about New Orleans accents, and is in production on AMERICAN TONGUES, a study of dialect differences across the U.S.

Comments

Works In Progress

Paty Bustamante

The Gordon Medusa (Marilyn Gottlieb-Roberts) caught by Perseus (Michael Bleichfeld) as part of GATHERING EVIDENCE, an arts project in the Southeastern U.S. 9-21-84 to 9-21-85. (Photo by Michael Bleichfeld)

Marylin Gottlieb-Roberts -- Miami, Fl.

Gathering Evidence, a year long cumulative, collaborative, and interactive arts project, conceived by Marylin Gottlieb-Roberts was begun on September 21, 1984 at the University of Miami New Gallery, in Coral Gables, Florida and it will conclude on September 21, 1985 at the same location. This project has been on the road for approximately ten months throughout five Southeastern states. "The purpose of this exhibit is to connect communities of people who have art as a focus and to provide a mirror of their communities. One reason that art is so valuable is that it provides an aesthetic distance; it becomes a mirror, a medium through which we see things and experience the world." The theme of the exhibit is the Perseus Myth. By including the overlay of the constellations of the Perseus myth upon each location, the myth is placed in context and it becomes a way of marking the passage of time and of exploring the relations between men and women, the individual and the group, and especially the difference between linear, logical thought and the mystery of intuition. *Gathering Evidence* consists of artistic, musical and theatrical activities in which the public can participate and also allows area artists to contribute slides of their work which become part of the project. At each location, backed by composer Russell Frehling's Perseid sounds, visitors participate on the Perseid Pageant and the readings by the Xerox Oracle, work on the World Puzzle, and take part on the various interactive Xerox artifacts — Connect the Dots, Find the Picture, Star Portraits, the Exquisite Corpse, and the Slam Book. During the week following the opening, Marylin completes a painting in each area using photo stills provided by collaborating artists as subject matter. At the end of one year, *Gathering Evidence*, a document of history and everyday life experiences will again be on display, complete with new "evidence" gathered from artists in each region. The locations visited are, Coral Gables, FL; Orlando, FL; Pembroke Pines, FL; Tampa, FL; Atlanta, GA; Chapel Hill, NC; Knoxville, TN; Rome, GA; and Miami, FL. This project was supported in part by the Wolfson Campus of Miami-Dade Community College. For further information, contact Marylin Gottlieb-Roberts, 9355 S.W. 94th Street, Miami, FL 33176.

Robert Russett -- Lafayette, LA

Robert is working on an experimental film, tentatively called *Les Secret De La Famille (Secrets of the Family)*, about the French Acadiana region in Southwest Louisiana. The film is concerned with the comparative and visual possibilities of regional subject matter. "Unlike other films I have produced about French Acadiana, *Les Secret De La Famille* contains fractured elements of a fictional narrative. This story which includes a murder, an illegal operation, and other improvised sequences is interlaced with local film footage of real events. The timeline of the film is distorted and contrapuntal. Its structure, which is an interplay of fiction and non-fiction, is not designed to perpetuate conventional stereotypes of Acadiana, but rather to penetrate the world of psychic conflict which exists behind appearance and familial expectation." *Les Secret De La Famille* makes use of a number of effects such as stop-motion rephotography and video images. This production will be completed in the spring of 1986 and it will be released on 16mm film and ¾-inch video tape. Funding was granted by the Alabama Filmmakers Co-op and the Southwest Independent Production Fund. For further information, contact Robert Russett, Professor of Art and Media Studies, Box 41097, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, LA 70504.

Mark Spagnola -- Columbia, SC

Mark has completed production of *In The Tradition*, a series of thirteen one-hour radio broadcasts. *In The Tradition* features concert recordings by traditional and folk music performers. "I have always been interested in traditional music and culture. The airwaves are saturated with pre-fabricated rock and top 100. Classical and traditional music are often overlooked." The performances were recorded live in Charleston and at the Black Mountain Music Festival in North Carolina. Charleston Folk, a group dedicated to promoting traditional and folk music, assembled a variety of the talent showcased in the pieces. The performers come from all over the United States and represent various forms of folk music. This is a collection of excellent musicians and top folk performers which include Norman Blake, Kevin Burke and Michael D'omnhaill, Touchstone, Trapezoid, and Mick Maloney and Eugene O'Donnell. *In The Tradition* is a co-production of the Department of Media Arts and the Instructional Services Center at the University of South Carolina, in co-operation with the South Carolina Educational Radio Network. Assistant producer and audio engineer is Alfred Turner. The series was broadcast on Saturday mornings by the South Carolina Public Radio. This summer *In The Tradition* will be re-broadcast by WCQS FM in Asheville, NC and in January by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte radio station, WFAE. Mark would like to produce similar series in the future and hopes that *In The Tradition* will be broadcast nationally by the Public Radio Network. For more information on this series, contact Al Turner or Mike Sexton at the Media Arts Network University of South Carolina, Law Center, Columbia, SC 29208.

Ross Spears -- Johnson City, TN

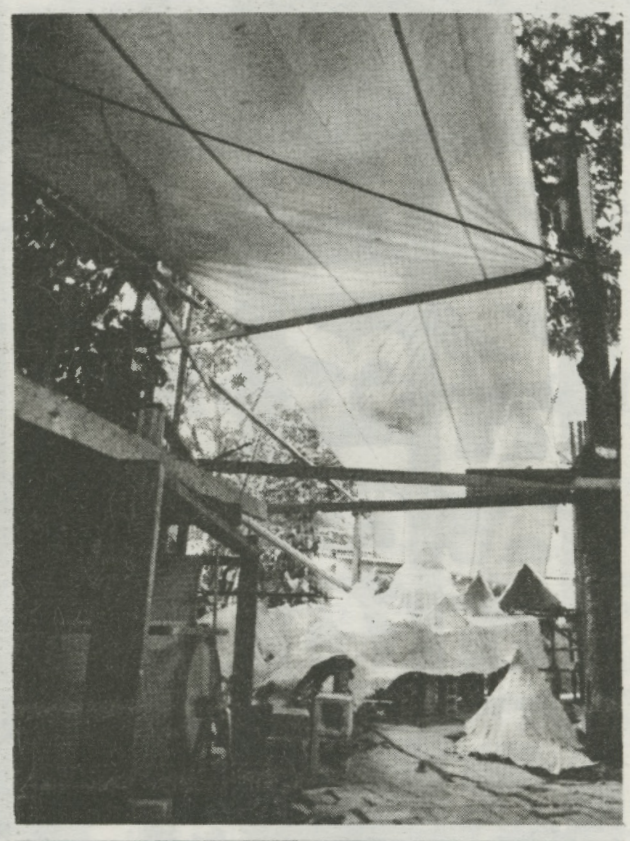
Ross is currently working on *Long Shadows*, a ninety minute documentary film about the legacy of the Civil War. Most of the footage has been shot and is in the process of being edited. Additional shooting will be completed this summer in a variety of Southern locations. The documentary will consist of interviews and archival material, such as: Civil War photographs, film clips from news stories, and clips from feature films about the Civil War. The interviews include a number of well-known people giving their impressions about the Civil War and North and South relations. Jimmy Carter talks about being the first Deep South President and how stereotyping of North and South is one of the ongoing legacies of the War. Robert Penn Warren describes the historic and economic legacy of the War and talks about his father — a Civil War veteran. Studs Turkel recounts the Civil Rights Movement and its relationship to the Civil War. "This is a film about ideas. The main point is that the past is strongly related to the present and the film is trying to make connections to the past. It depicts interesting images that relate to the way in which the Civil War is still a continuing presence in American society." *Long Shadows* was funded by the Humanities Committees of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. For further information, contact James Agee Film Project, 316½ E. Main Street, Johnson City, TN 37601.

Tim Glover -- Atlanta, GA

A Moment Of Light is a thirty minute narrative film about the friendship of Mike Sorrow and Cyed Johnson, or CJ. Mike Sorrow is a young runaway escaping from his parents and family life; CJ is running away from a personal tragedy and death. Together they travel down the road putting distance between themselves and their problems, while listening to bluegrass gospels, the only music they can pick up on a small transistor radio. Tim wrote the script which was very loosely inspired by Brian Eno's album *Apollo*. The album deals with space travel and attaining goals. The film deals with people's inner soul travels and searching for a place in which to be happy. "My films are about people and their problems and there is a little bit of something magical that I want to put into them." *A Moment Of Light* works on different levels: through the actual physical images and dialogue, and also through the soundtrack of bluegrass gospel songs. "A musician friend, John Martin, has produced the soundtrack almost in an incidental manner. The religious music is layered in such a way that we know it's coming from the radio, but somehow it transforms itself into the film music, where the lyrics provide an amusing yet sad comparison to what is going on in the lives of the two characters." Tim is presently in the post-production stage and plans to complete the film by the end of August. This production was partially funded by a grant from the American Film Institute. For more information, contact Tim Glover, 33 Cumberland Crossing, Smyrna, GA 30080.

Victor Jimenez -- South Miami, FL

Victor's current project, *La Lampara (The Lamp)*, is a short animated film inspried by *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. "It is the first time this book has been translated into English and it deals with reincarnation and what happens during the interval between death and re-birth. Using three distinct animation techniques, the film will metaphorically depict the radical shifts in consciousness that are said to occur between life, death and rebirth." Through the use of special animated effects, an analogy will be drawn to the winemaking process. The grape is pressed, and then fermented to create the wine, which is essentially a new "life form" of the grape. The film will unfold in three stages: Stop-Motion Death, using stop-motion animation; Animated Illusions, using traditional cel animation; and Live-Action Re-Entry, using 35mm live-action cinematography. The first stage, shot in a miniature set, will show the death of the main character as he falls off a tightrope into a river and is violently pulled towards a waterfall. Miraculously, he is swept up and finds himself soaring over tombstones and graveyards that eventually metamorphosize into vineyards. Stage II depicts the "intermediate occurrence" between death and re-birth. "The character, now in astral form, will encounter the geometric karmic illusions." These three geometic forms, blue sphere, a yellow cube, and a red pyramid represent the grape, the winepress and fermentation process, and the wine itself. Thus, an analogy of the life-death cycle is begun. Once the wine is ready and begins gushing out of the pyramid, Stage III is entered. This stage reveals a young child at play in a lamp-lit wine cellar. He is playing with toys and building blocks that actually are the geometric forms and the miniature set seen earlier in the film. "This is a portrayal of the delicate balance of life and death, illustrated and explained metaphorically. The acceptance of the fate and consequently, the acknowledgement of a supreme and infinite existence is cinematically shown in the three-fold animated journey of our character." For more information on this production, contact Victor Jimenez, 6510 Manor Lane, South Miami, FL 33143.



A photo of the miniature set used in Victor Jimenez's short animated film, LA LAMPARA (THE LAMP).

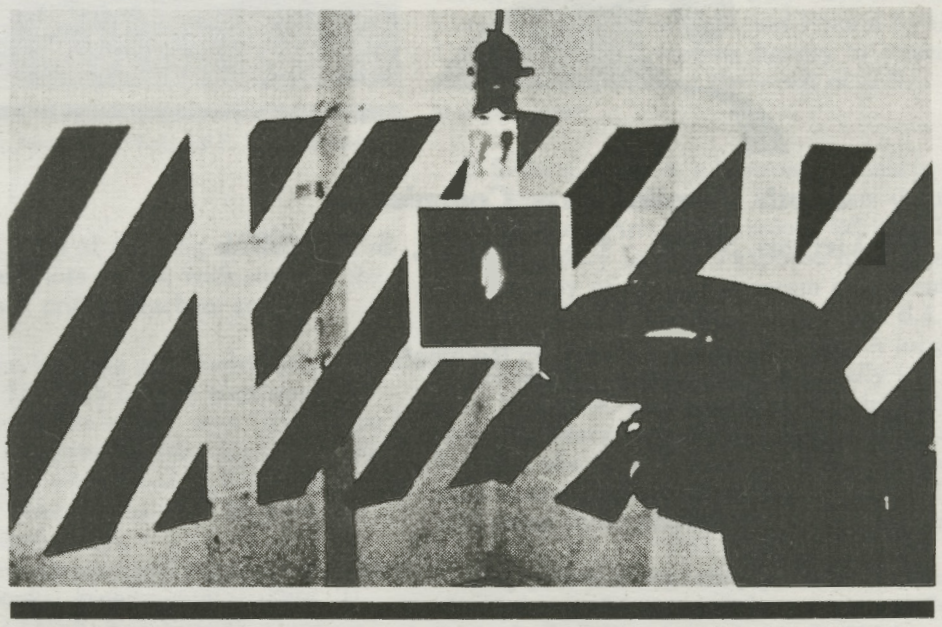
Paty Bustamante is an independent animator in Columbia, South Carolina.

A SOUTHERN FILM EXPERIENCE TO AIR NOV. 20

The Media Arts Center has co-produced a half-hour television special on the art of filmmaking in the South with the South Carolina Educational Television Network. A *Southern Film Experience* shows the exciting variety and imagination of independently produced films by filmmakers all over the South, and will be broadcast over the SCETV network, Wednesday, November 20, at 10:30 p.m. Just as the South has a distinctive history, culture, landscape and makeup, so do the films produced here. Rich in artistic vision and colored by a sense of place, they are nevertheless not restricted to what is commonly thought of as "Southern."

Written and hosted by South Carolina independent filmmaker Jan Millsapps, and directed and edited by independent video artist Bob Landau, the show features clips of dramatic, documentary, animated, and experimental films produced in the South. The show was taped on location at various Southern sites appropriate to each film shown, such as a rural beach, a diner, a train station, and an animation studio. A *Southern Film Experience* is intended to introduce viewers to this exciting art form, and ranges from traditional Southern topics (like grits) to more personal forms of filmmaking. Here's a short list of films and topics covered.

Inside Story Bill Turner/NC	a dramatic film delving into childhood memories
Red Ball Express Steve Segal/VA	a delightful animated ride on a hand-drawn train to a bouncing fiddle tune
Maybe Next Week Sometime David Boatwright/SC	a documentary on black music in South Carolina's low country; jazz, blues, gospel
Soft Sand Nancy Yasecko/SC	self-exploration juxtaposed with the soft sand of beach and urban environments
It's Grits Stan Woodward/VA	an all time classic investigation into Southern style food and humor
L'Acadie Robert Russell/VA	postcard-like sketches of Louisiana landscapes impressionistically shot



A still from W.A. Brown's LIGHT CORNER, part of the television special A SOUTHERN FILM EXPERIENCE.

Light Corner W.A. Brown/GA	an ordinary lightbulb elevated to a dramatic design element
Full Frame One Tom Whiteside/NC	persistence of vision colors are created from white etched in black film
True Romance Jan Millapps/SC	a filmmaker's live and animated look at the meaning of romance

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The South Carolina Arts Commission is a state agency which promotes the visual, literary, performing and media arts in South Carolina. The SCAC Media Arts Center supports media artists and media arts in a ten-state southeastern region, which includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, as well as South Carolina. Both SCAC and SCACMAC receive funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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